



T.S. Hill Middle School

District: Dexter R-XI Schools

Building Enrollment: 484

Grade Range: 6-8



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A Snapshot of T.S. Hill Middle School...

T.S. Hill Middle School is located in the community of Dexter, at the top of the Missouri bootheel in Stoddard County, which covers 819 square miles of varied geographical terrain. Drained swamps in the southeast corner have produced acres of prime farmland row-cropped with cotton, soybeans, rice, and corn. Interest groups have preserved and protected numerous acres of swampland and the largest stand of native holly trees in the United States. A high limestone ridge bisects the county north to south, and the "ice cream" delta soil gives way to rocky outcroppings and rolling hills. Union forces occupied the county seat, Bloomfield, during the Civil War, and *The Stars and Stripes* newspaper was first printed there in 1862. Other small towns, villages, and communities built up around farming and commerce. Dexter, the largest town with a population of around 8,000, spawned from the laying of Union Pacific tracks in 1969. Arvin-Meritor and Tyson are the largest employers in the district, and Dexter Memorial Hospital provides healthcare, outreach services, and jobs. Numerous parks, churches, and a ball complex afford the community a place to gather and share. The town has become the center for county shopping and employment, and its schools have become the innovative leaders for the other seven districts in the county.

The Dexter R-XI Schools have a tradition of providing outstanding educational programs while weathering the increasing hardships of rural southeast Missouri demographics. The district has been "Accredited with Distinction" since the inception of the state's accreditation program. The four attendance centers within the district currently enroll 2100 students. Constructed in 1976, the middle school was named after former superintendent T.S. Hill – a strong, community-focused man who played a vital role in laying the groundwork for the middle school concept, focusing on transitioning students from elementary to high school while providing support for academic success, personal development, and peer acceptance. Today, the building guides 484 students through its hallways, accommodating personal and intellectual growth, and fostering students' accountability and ownership for achievement and actions.

T.S. Hill Middle School's Mission: "...to guide students toward educational excellence by providing a positive and safe learning environment which fosters respect, responsibility, and cooperation among students, their families, and the community."

Challenging Hurdles...Innovative Solutions

Geographic and economic limitations create challenging hurdles for T.S. Hill Middle School's students and their families. The building's free and reduced lunch rate has increased from 39 percent in 2001 to more than 50 percent in 2005. Incidence of child abuse and neglect is high, as is out-of-home placement, possibly

due to heavy production and use of illegal drugs in the county. Many children are living in poverty, and the district's mobility rate has climbed to 33 percent. The staff at T.S. Hill Middle School meets these challenges head-on, working daily to meet diverse learners' needs through core, exploratory, support, vocational, and enrichment curriculum. Reading is the cornerstone of the curriculum in all content areas and all grade levels.

"At T.S. Hill Middle School, we realize that all teachers are reading teachers."

Powerful learning experiences prevail in classrooms throughout the school. An observer traveling T.S. Hill Middle School's hallways might discover a sixth grade student in social studies making a presentation on a Latin American country while the student audience tastes an authentic dish from that country. In another classroom, students in a reading class complete a unit on Egypt and acquire an understanding of the mummification process by mummifying their own carved apples. Around the corner in the seventh grade hall, science students are creating the anatomy of cells using modeling clay, styrofoam balls, and toothpicks. In the Tech Power lab, literature students participate in an online forum. Using research, sound instructional practices, and a strong community base, T.S. Hill Middle School teachers create unique learning opportunities that engage all types of learners.

The T.S. Hill Middle School staff searches tirelessly to find ways to provide all students with the tools necessary for success. An adaptive technology loan reimbursement program provides an enlarger for a visually impaired student and a voice-activated computer for a cerebral palsy student. A Litewriter "talking keyboard" affords a non-verbal autistic student the opportunity to communicate. One of the school's special education teachers focuses exclusively on reading. The school's PLUS (Promoting Life-Long Understanding Success) before-and-after-school tutoring program benefits all students.

Strength in Tradition

T.S. Hill Middle School is rich in traditions that help to define the school's culture. With an average teaching experience of 16 years in the building, many faculty members work in the same classrooms where they once sat as students or work alongside their former teachers. These dedicated teachers are role models for life-long learning. All are certified and more than half have earned advanced degrees. Teachers enthusiastically

"Because of the close-knit atmosphere and stability of the Middle School faculty, we view ourselves more as a family – celebrating births and birthdays, crying together through hardships and losses, cheering triumphs and conquests, and staring challenges and obstacles in the face together!"

share their pride in the school's history with their students, creating a strong, caring learning community. The TAP (Teacher Advisory Program) allows teachers and students the small-group opportunity at the close of each day to share and develop into a team to meet the challenges of middle school. Students are encouraged to contribute to the continuation of the school's traditions through both curricular and extra-curricular activities and are recognized for their efforts. Each Monday, a student leads the Pledge of Allegiance; students who have reached specific reading goals are recognized over the intercom; the MVP (Most Valuable Person) rewards students who perform random acts of kindness or make a special contribution to a positive learning environment.

Also contributing to continuing T.S. Hill Middle School's tradition of excellent education is the broad goal of fostering respect, responsibility and cooperation among students, families, and the community. Character education at T.S. Hill is evident through community service projects that encourage honesty, strong decision-making skills, social awareness, self-awareness, and citizenship. Community projects have flourished,

strengthening the interdependence between the school and the community, and ensuring that the strong traditions that are T.S. Hill Middle School will continue for many years to come.

Gold Star Practices – What’s Working at T.S. Hill Middle School

- ★ *On the two Mondays during MAP testing week, students wear socks all day to “Sock It To The MAP,” and “Put On Their Thinking Caps” by wearing caps or hats.*
- ★ *At the close of school, teachers reflect on their year during what they know as “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly” meeting. Through researched learning strategies like Think-Pair-Share, Graffiti, Expert Groups, and Walk-About, the administration leads faculty on a journey celebrating successes and identifying challenges.*
- ★ *Because the faculty does not have common planning times, the administration created half a day of character education and vocational planning activities and presentations so the teachers could support one another in a common endeavor and have the time to weave interdependence into their classroom activities.*

Through an intricately woven plan of missions, visions, and goals, T.S. Hill Middle School provides strong academic and non-academic challenges, unique learning opportunities, and a strong emphasis on basic skills, enabling students to become diverse and dynamic life-learners.